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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the reading interests of fourth and sixth grade students of above-average reading achievement. Subjects, 44 fourth graders and 39 sixth graders in an urban environment, responded to a reading interest inventory containing 25 categories. The sample was separated into two groups, an experimental group which attained 60 or higher in a standardized reading test, Degrees of Reading Power, and a control group which had scored below the 60th percentile. Results indicated that there were no significant differences in reading interests between fourth and sixth grade above-average readers. Results also indicated that boys showed a greater interest than girls in the following areas: short stories; comics; science fiction stories; and sport, science, and mechanical magazines. (Two tables of data are included; 17 references and two appendixes of data are attached.) (RS)

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An Investigation to Determine Classification of Interests in Reading Material of Above Average Readers In The Fourth and Sixth Grades

By

Jo Ann Intonato

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts Degree
Kean College of New Jersey

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate the reading interests of fourth and sixth grade students of above average reading achievement. Forty-four forth graders and thirty-nine sixth graders responded to a reading interest inventory containing twenty-five categories. The sample was separated into two groups, the experimental sample consisting of those attaining a national percentile score on the standardized reading achievement test Degrees of Reading Power of 60 or higher and, a control sample, those scoring below the 60th percentile. The scores were tabulated and a correlation coefficient was computed.

Results indicated no significant differences for the grade variable. However, in the sex variable, boys showed greater interests in the areas of sports, science and mechanical magazines. They also showed a greater interest in short stories, comics and science fiction stories than girls indicated.

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I wish to express my gratitude to my husband, Joseph, who supports me, my daughters, Michele and Janine, who inspire me, to Dr. Mazurkiewicz for his professional advisement and his understanding and to Cheryl Mustachio whose encouragement sustained me.

LIST OF TABLES

I. Comparison of reading interests by grade level.

II. Comparison of Students' reading interests by sex and grade.

It is now generally recognized that to promote the reading habit and to produce a generation of book lovers, there is no other factor so powerful as interest. Interest determines not only the areas within which children will make their reading choices, but more important, it determines how much children will read or even whether they will become "readers" at all. (E.V. Dechant 1982, 1970, 1964).

Ruth Strang (1957) found that if a book or article has meaning, use and purpose for the individual, he will put forth the effort that reading demands. Therefore, a genuine interest in the material being read will motivate pupils to master basic skills and "foster a continuing interest in reading".

"When moved by a high degree of interest, children show increased energy to work persistently at reading until satisfaction is gained from accomplishment. (Virgil M. Howes, April 1963). Virgil Howes further stated that "A teacher with information on reading attitudes and interests of individual children can adjust her/his teaching to make reading experiences door openers for limitless opportunities for pupil growth. The idea that using a child's interest to foster growth in reading achievement is somewhat supported by Diane S. Hall, 1978. Hall stated that "When ability improves, attitude often improves and when attitude improves, ability often improves". By capitalizing on the students natural interest and curiosity, ability in reading can be a natural by-product.

George D. Spache, Ph.D. (1970) stated that "Interest is the primary factor to be considered in attempting to stimulate reading".

Since it is clear that interest plays a high role in reading selection, it is also clear that educators must continually assess those interests and exploit them to the students' advantage. Ruth Strang states (1964) that "Interest is often the key that unlocks effort; it has a dynamic effect on the way children read" specifically, however, what are children interested in reading. What material has the power to turn a child away from the magnetic draw of the television or other less worthy pursuits? Are there differences of reading interests between children who read exceptionally well and the average or below average reader? If a pattern can be identified, regardless of a particular child's intelligence quotient, the desire to read can be stimulated by focusing on that particular child's interest. It is to be hoped, therefore, that a positive cycle can be developed of interest, increased ability, self-motivation. According to E.V. Dechant, "Low motivation is not always caused by "within-self" factors. It may be caused by materials that are too difficult or uninteresting, by lack of purpose, or by a home environment which does not encourage achievement.

It is clear that further study in the area of pupil interest is needed.

HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis of this study is that there is no difference between the reading interests of fourth and sixth grade pupils who are above average in reading ability or between male and female students.

PROCEDURE

Eighty-three fourth and sixth grade urban students of similar background and socioeconomic status were given a standardized achievement test, the Degrees of Reading Power. Only those scoring sixty (60) or above on the test, above average reading ability, were then selected for inclusion in the final sample. This sample was then given a reading interest inventory containing twenty-five categories. They were asked to rate each category by indicating:

A = most interested

B = sometimes interested

C = hardly or not at all interested

A was given a numeric value of 3, B was given a numeric value of 2 and C was given a numeric value of 1. This sample was divided into two variable categories, grade and sex. Comparisons were made by number of high interest responses in each category per grade and sex. Only high interest, A responses, were calculated and recorded.

Individual total reading interest scores were also calculated by adding all the numeric values in the A, B, and C responses and data was analyzed.

RESULTS

As indicated in Table I, the means of the two samples are separated by slightly more than one point. The resultant t

Table I

Comparison of Students' reading interests by grade level.

Sample	Raw Score	S.D.	t
N = 6th grade	48.13	6.42	.35
N = 4th grade	49.27	7.03	

indicates that there is no significant difference between fourth and sixth grades in reading interests.

The information in Table II indicates that the sixth grade male students gave a rating of 6 or 7 to such reading.

Table II

Comparison of Students' reading interests by sex and grade.

Rating of 6 or 7 Sixth grade males	comic books, movie magazines science fiction, comic strips
Rating of 5 or 6 Sixth grade females	movie magazines, poems
Rating of 6 or 7 Fourth grade males	short stories, comic books
Rating of 5 or 6 Fourth grade females	comic strips

material as comic books, movie magazines, science fiction, comic strips, short stories. This rating is nothing more then a report by students of the kinds of material they liked to read. Of the sixteen sixth grade students, for example, comic books were chosen by seven males, while science fiction was chosen by six males. The score of six or seven indicated the popular nature of these materials among the sample.

As can be seen, there is a commonality between sixth grade boys and girls in liking to read movie magazines but sixth grade males choose to read more types of materials indicating science fiction and comic materials while sixth grade girls choose to read poems in addition to movie magazines.

Further differences were noted in the sex variable, with sixth grade males showing a preference for comic books, science, mechanical and movie magazines, comic strips and science fictions stories.

Sixth grade females showed no interest in mechanical magazines, science fiction and sports stories, editorials and advice columns. They indicated a low interest in comic books and science magazines.

Sixth grade males and females showed an equal interest in comic strips, biographies, how-to-do books and movie magazines. Sixth grade females showed as greater interest in poetry but overall indicated a lower range of reading interests than males.

Fourth grade males showed a preference for sports stories, comic strips, comic books, science magazines, and how-to-do books. This sample, however, selected the short stories category most frequently.

Fourth grade females showed a high preference for comic strips and slightly less preference for how-to-do books. They indicated no interest in news stories, sports stories, editorials, advice columns, ads, sports and news magazines, "social" magazines, biographies and religious books.

Both fourth grade males and females showed an equal preference for reviews of books, theater, films and T.V., poems and plays.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The major hypothesis of this study, that there would be no difference between the reading interests of fourth and sixth grade pupils who are above average in reading ability or between male and female students was accepted. The subordinating hypothesis that there would be no difference in reading interests between the sexes was rejected.

This study also revealed that sixth grade males showed an overall more varied range of reading interests than sixth grade females. Fourth grade males and females showed the same overall range of reading interest.

These results should affect choices made by classroom teachers and school librarians in providing high interest material for both genders at the fourth and sixth grade levels in the categories indicated as well as high interest reading material in categories in which reading interests overlap at those grade levels.

READING INTEREST: RELATED RESEARCH

Many studies investigating reading preferences and interests, have been conducted through the years. Researchers who have studied pupil interests in relation to reading have presented such factors as: age, grade level, sex, sex differences, geographic location, social class, socioeconomic status, and types of reading materials in their studies.

"The great increase in individualized or personalized reading instruction has resulted from the realization that the interest approach to teaching reading is highly effective... From a practical point of view, allowing children to select reading materials of their own, presents some expected problems. These problems, however, instead of being disadvantages can actually be turned into teaching aids" (Walter Barbe, 1963:488).

Helen Robinson (1974:3) noted that over three hundred investigations of reading preferences were published before 1960, in the United States. Although reading interests is an area of study today, Robinson (1974) noted that the number of research studies, in reading interests, have declined.

Getzels (1966) identified the following four areas as ones in which research in reading interests was deficient: 1) precision of definition; 2) rigor of theory; 3) depth of analysis; and 4) exactness of observation. Zimet (1966) noted that often there were conflicting results given in studies done on reading interests. These she attributed to the use of dissimilar population samples and to different methods used in assessing children's interests.

May Lazar (1937) was interested in determining the effect of

intelligence upon the reading interests of children. She conducted a study using 2,027 pupils of which 1,038 were boys and 989 were girls attending thirteen public schools in New York City. The schools were composed of children of various nationalities, socioeconomic groups and levels of intelligence. The majority of the children who participated in this study were in the fourth through sixth grades and ages 10 through 12. Using the Stanford Binet Scale, the children were classified as to intelligence. Thirty-one percent of the children involved were classified as bright, 38% were average and 31% were dull.

May Lazar administered an inventory record to each child participating in the study. The pupils recorded answers in response to questions which were read aloud.

The following results were obtained from information recorded on the inventory cards. The dull pupils indicated that spelling and arithmetic were their favorite subjects. The bright and average students preferred history.

Girls, regardless of classification, were more interested in owning library cards than boys.

Boys read less books per month than girls. Average and dull boys read less books per month than average and dull girls. The largest percentage of 'no books read' was found with the dull group of pupils. It was determined that intelligence was closely related to the number of books read.

Regardless of their intellectual classification, in general mystery stories were liked the best by the boys and girls. There were, however, differences in reading interests affected by sex.

Boys preferred to read imaginative stories (adventure and mystery) and realistic stories (science and history). Girls were more interested in reading fairy tales. Boys were only slightly interested in reading books selected by girls; particularly boys in the group classified as intellectually dull. Girls, however, wanted to read books selected by boys. The bright pupils favored more realistic and more difficult books than the dull pupils. There was a relationship found between books preferred and IQ.

Both boys and girls indicated that the comics was their favorite section of the newspaper. Although girls read more sections of the newspaper, boys read the newspaper more frequently. It was found that both boys and girls termed brighter, read the more intellectual sections of the newspaper.

Dull pupils read more fairy tales than did bright or average pupils and bright pupils read more books than average or dull pupils. More "serious" type books were read by the bright pupil.

Robert Thorndike (1941) did a research study to investigate the reading interest of 2,891 students in the fourth through twelfth grades. He used a questionnaire with fictitious titles.

He found that similar reading interests were demonstrated by both bright and dull children of the same age. When the bright children, however, were two years younger than the slow children, the reading interests became even more similar.

Thorndike found that age and intelligence played a lesser role in reading interests than did sex. Girls had very different reading preferences to boys.

A study conducted by Margaret L. Droney, Stella M. Cucchiara

and Alice M. Scipione (1953) also found sex preferences. They were interested in determining which titles and stories found in intermediate basal readers were preferred by fourth, fifth and sixth graders. Two questionnaires were administered to two groups of students (1,498 and 744 children, respectively) attending elementary school in Everett, Wakefield, Lowell, Watertown, Belmont, Winchester, and Nasira, New Hampshire.

Their findings indicated that the most popular titles of stories were those which contained familiar and meaningful vocabulary. Children preferred titles of stories which they had read.

Although girls selected titles and stories which dealt with boys, boys were unwilling to choose titles and stories which dealt with girls. Girls preferred to read imaginative stories, emotional stories and stories about homelife and familiar experiences. Boys were interested in reading stories about animals, out-of-doors, adventure, exploration and heroes.

When they compared gifted and dull children, as determined by ranking in upper and lower quartile respectively, both groups expressed an interest in animal stories, fairy tales and imaginative stories. Gifted children, however, expressed a preference for fact-based stories than did dull children. George Norvel (1955) did a research study using 50,000 pupils, grades three through eight. 1200 New York State Teachers, organized and collected data which served as the basis of information for this study as well as earlier and unpublished material.

The pupils were asked to complete a report form in which they

were to rate various reading selections as "very interesting", "fairly interesting", and "uninteresting".

Once again sex was an important factor in determining children's reading interest, starting as early as the third grade.

Similar to other studies, girls liked to read "boys'" books, but boys were mostly intolerant to "girls'" books. Girls preferred romantic love stories while boys preferred stories containing violent struggle. Both boys and girls enjoyed stories about horses and dogs and mysteries.

Norvell found that IQ had no effect upon reading interests. He noted that superior, average and slow students liked the same reading material.

A study to determine the effect of sex, reading achievement and IQ upon reading interests was conducted by Vera Slover (1959). Using 356 fourth graders attending the Community Unit Schools of Mattoon, Illinois, Slover classified the children involved in this study as to intelligence and reading achievement.

A high IQ ranged from 110 and up, an average IQ ranged from 90 to 109 and a low IQ ranged from 89 and below.

A grade level of 5.0 or more was considered high reading achievement, 3.1 through 4.9 was average reading achievement and 3.0 and below was low reading achievement.

An interest questionnaire containing 18 items was given to the pupils. They were asked to indicate if they liked comic books. Ninety percent responded positively and ten percent responded negatively. When asked if they preferred comic books to story books, Slover found that the more intelligent children as

well as those with high reading achievement preferred story books to comic books. Pupils with average reading achievement reported enjoying comic books and story books equally, but pupils with an average or low IQ as well as low reading achievement indicated a preference for comics only.

Those pupils who indicated a preference for comic books cited humorous content as the reason for the preference. Pupils preferring storybooks felt that they were more interesting.

The fourth graders were asked to indicate the type of stories in which they were most interested. Girls indicated fairy tales, humorous and animal stories. Boys indicated a preference for cowboy and Indian stories and stories about great men.

Slover concluded in this study that IQ, reading ability and sex affected reading interests.

Wallace Ramsey (1962) studied the reading interest, habits and self concepts of pupils with high and low reading ability in grades four, five and six in two elementary schools in Indiana. Sixty-one poor readers (reading one grade below level) and 81 good readers (reading one or more grades above level) as measured by the Standford Reading Test, participated in this study. A 21 item questionnaire was administered to each of these pupils.

The results indicated that, in general, both high and low reading ability students named arithmetic as their preferred subject. Reading was the favorite subject of 14% of the high reading ability pupils and 6% of the low reading ability pupils.

When asked to list the number of books read during the school year as well as the number of books owned, the low reading ability

pupils read an average of 13 books and owned and average of 10 books compared to the high reading ability pupil reporting an average of 30 read during the year and an average of 25 books owned.

When asked to note the title of the best book they had ever read, similar choices were made by girls with high and low reading ability. The types of books mentioned, in rank order, were mysteries, stories about children, stories about familiar experiences, romance and animal stories. Adventure stories were the only type of book mentioned frequently by low reading ability boys. Animal stories, biographies, stories about children and familiar experiences, mystery and science stories were noted occasionally. Boys with high reading ability liked adventure stories and biographies the most. Both low and high reading ability boys mentioned animal stories, stories about children and familiar experiences, mystery and science stories infrequently.

This research indicated that there were greater sex preference difference than preferences indicated between reading abilities.

To determine potential reading interests, each of the students were given eight fictitious book titles to examine. They were asked to check the one book he or she preferred. Again sex influenced the potential reading interests of children. Both high and low reading ability girls preferred to read mystery books while boys of both high and low reading ability preferred undersea adventures, mystery, biographies and space adventures.

When leisure time reading was measured, both high and low

reading ability girls preferred to spend their time reading to doing anything else, while both high and low reading ability boys indicated a preference for spending their leisure time playing baseball or basketball.

A Comparison study of reading interests of high achievers and low achievers was conducted by Robert S. Langer (1970).

Using a questionnaire, he asked 264 pupils in the fourth and fifth grades what their reading preferences were.

Langer found that 56% of the high achievers preferred library books if they were permitted to choose any type of book. Of the 56%, 45% felt that library books should be used in the classroom. Low achievers, preferred books with a comic strip format and 45% of the low achievers wanted to read this kind of material in the classroom.

Humorous stories were preferred by most of all of the fourth and fifth graders regardless of their achievement.

Another study comparing reading interests and ability was conducted by Therese Bissen Bard 1970).

Bard found, after reviewing some articles concerning reading interests, that "Research indicates that children of the same age will enjoy the same story despite considerable differences in IQ and reading ability. Therefore, the teacher can be quite safe in assuming that students in the same grade will like or dislike the same stories regardless of difference in intelligence."

Lian-Hwang Chiu (1973) conducted an investigation of reading interests of high, average and low reading ability fourth grade pupils. Criteria for ability was defined by the classroom

teacher. A forty-five item questionnaire covering ten categories of books. The sample of fourth graders consisted of 53 boys and 46 girls, all fourth graders from two elementary schools located in North Central Indiana. The children were white, from working or middle class families residing in rural areas.

Chiu found, as a result of this study that: 1) there are no significant differences in the reading interests of high ability readers, average ability readers and low ability readers in the fourth grade. 2) There are significant sex preference differences. Girls indicated a greater interest in adventure, fantasy, humor and poetry books. Boys preferred biographies, science books, sports and social studies books.

Dawn F. Ciccone, (1981) conducted a comparative study of sixth grade females and intermediate grade males to determine how reading interests and attitudes related to their self-selected reading materials. Fifty students completed questionnaires concerning their attitudes and interests and used log sheets to record information about their self-selected reading materials. Results indicated that in a nine-week period, boys read approximately 17 books while girls read approximately 24 books. The most popular subjects for boys were sports and cartoons/comics, and for girls fiction and cartoons/comics. The majority of the students reported that they preferred to choose their own reading materials as opposed to having someone else select those materials, and forty-one of the students regarded reading as a pleasurable activity. The findings indicate that student reading attitudes and interests are relevant to self-selected reading materials.

Marguerite G. Jones (1983) conducted an investigation of reading interests and attitudes of fifth-graders. An interest inventory was administered to seventy-five fifth graders to determine their attitudes toward reading and the kinds of reading material they preferred. In addition, an observer completed reading behavior checklists for each student, and the student completed a second inventory to discover the amount of reading they did as opposed to other recreational activities. These data were then compared to records of books checked out by the children from their school library. The results indicated that fifth grade students liked to read a great deal and that they most enjoyed reading mysteries and humorous books. However, comics were the only reading materials most indicated having in their homes. Many of the students indicated they were happy when reading, but few noted that they actually picked up a book during their free time. Talking, drawing, or playing games, respectively, were the preferences for leisure time activities.

A study of the relation of interest and incentive to the reading comprehension of average and below-average readers was conducted by Shirley Feldman and Doke E. Blom (1981). The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship of interest in story content, external incentives, and reading level to elementary school children's reading performance. Seventy-five fifth grade students who were either average or below-average readers were asked to rate the content of five stories from "most" to "least" interesting and were then assigned to a group in which they read stories with their most or least interesting content choice. The

subjects reading comprehension was measured by a cloze procedure. Two incentive conditions were used. In the first, a criterion contingency, each subject was told that he or she would receive a reward after reading each paragraph of the story if he or she had as many or more correct answers than the announced criterion for that paragraph. In the second condition, the control, the subject received a reward after reading the entire story, but no criterion for correct answers was used. Results showed that external incentives enhanced reading performance for average as well as below-average readers. While interest inventory content did not appear to be a significant factor in the study, all below-average readers had higher comprehension scores than did the average readers

SUMMARY OF RELATED LITERATURE

Although there were a number of factors involved in assessing the reading interests of elementary school children, the results of the studies cited that the greatest influencing factor in determining similarities and differences was sex preferences. Boys had similar interests regardless of intelligence and achievement when compared to the same age group and girls demonstrated similar preferences, regardless of intelligence and achievement when compared to the same age group.

Most studies found that although bright pupils had greater interests, the reading preferences of bright, average and dull pupils were similar. Socio-economic status did not appear to be an influencing factor in reading interests.

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APPENDICES

Results of Fourth Grade Interest Survey:

Numbers indicated high interest rating of above average reading achievers.

	Male	Female
1. News stories	0	0
2. Sports stories	4	0
3. Editorials	0	0
4. Comic strips	5	6
5. Advice columns	0	0
6. Reviews of books, theater, films & T.V.	3	3
7. Society pages	0	1
8. Ads	0	0
9. Comic books	6	3
10. Sports magazines	4	0
11. News magazines	0	0
12. Movie magazines	0	3
13. Science magazines	4	1
14. "Mechanical" magazines	3	1
15. "Social" magazines	1	0
16. Biographies	2	0
17. Autobiographies	0	1
18. How-to-do books	5	4
19. Religious books	1	0
20. Science fiction	4	2
21. Short stories	7	3
22. Novels	3	1
23. Poems	3	3
24. Plays	3	3
25. Essays	0	1

Results of Sixth Grade Interest Survey:

Numbers indicated high interest rating of above average reading achievers.

	Male	Female
1. News stories	2	3
2. Sports stories	3	0
3. Editorials	0	0
4. Comic strips	6	5
5. Advice columns	2	0
6. Reviews of books, theater, films & T.V.	3	2
7. Society pages	0	1
8. Ads	0	3
9. Comic books	7	3
10. Sports magazines	4	0
11. News magazines	0	2
12. Movie magazines	7	6
13. Science magazines	5	2
14. "Mechanical" magazines	5	0
15. "Social" magazines	0	1
16. Biographies	3	3
17. Autobiographies	0	3
18. How-to-do books	4	4
19. Religious books	3	2
20. Science fiction	6	0
21. Short stories	1	3
22. Novels	2	4
23. Poems	2	5
24. Plays	2	4
25. Essays	1	2